# EXPLORING GENDER PERCEPTIONS IN DIASPORIC SPACE: STUDY OF SELECT TEXTS BY JHUMPA LAHIRI AND BHARATI MUKHERJEE

## SYNOPSIS

Submitted to

Lingaya's Vidyapeeth

in the partial fulfilment for the

degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

in English by

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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the synopsis entitled "EXPLORING GENDER PERCEPTIONS IN DIASPORIC SPACE: STUDY OF SELECT TEXTS BY JHUMPA LAHIRI AND BHARATI MUKHERJEE" submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of ENGLISH, School of HUMANTIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, Lingaya's Vidyapeeth, Faridabad, is a record of bonafide research carried out by Simran Punia Reg. No. (20PHEG03) under my supervision and no part of this synopsis has been submitted for any other degree. The assistance and help received during the course of this investigation have been acknowledged**.**

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# INTRODUCTION

Diasporic literature was not much of importance forty fifty years ago but it has gained a lot of importance in the contemporary times.

Diaspora is a concept that occurs right from the beginning of human civilisation. People have been moving around from one place to another, from one continent to another, from one country to another, from one region withing the country to another. People are always in the process of shifting, always in the process of knowing the outer world away from their homeland. It is both important and problematic at the same time. But diaspora writing is different. Diasporic writing treats activities of diaspora as a subject of depiction in novels, poems etc. Diaspora writing as a genre emerges at a particular time that is second half of the twentieth century. There was a kind of mass upheaval in the world in the mid twentieth century following the phenomena of second world war. The world seemed to be redefined or redrawn by the impact of second world war. And new nations emerged and within nations movements of communities also took place. So roughly speaking second half of twentieth century has seen this emergence of diasporic writings.

First word that is connected to the concept of diaspora is '***Shifting***'. Diaspora is generally shifting, going away, leaving a place, one has lived at a certain place for some time or for a long time and then a particular incident or happening occur because of which people think of shifting from that place to another. In India there has been great shifting which has been connected to partition where whole communities' whole social formations they shifted ground from one place to another that created in its wake large number of issues and problems. So, when you shift from one place to another as a group in society and not to come back home that would generally mean diaspora.

Second word connected with concept of diaspora is ***'scattering'***. Scattering in the sense that human formations or social formations at a particular place go in to different directions under the impact of certain events and wherever they go that area is inhabited in a different manner and if they go in different directions, it is kind of scattering descriptively that happens of that community. There are certain population in India that have scattered all over the globe in last hundred years or even more.

Third word connected with the concept of diaspora is '***migration***'. Migrating has the element of going legally. Legal in the sense that one takes permission from their country and also make sure that to the country which they are going welcomes to certain extent and with mutual consent of two countries one leaves and settles.

Shifting and scattering are more related to shifting of groups or communities meanwhile migration can also be at individual level.

Another word connected to diaspora is '***uprooting***' having negative connotation. When a group or community decides to leave a place and shift to another place and that particular shifting is forced one, certain circumstances compel them to leave their place and move to another one it can be called as uprooting. So, roots are struck from their home and then taken somewhere else. Uprooting also means re-rooting somewhere else or place where the community or persons settles down after leaving their homeland. Uprooting and re-rooting is a pattern difficult to comprehend as it easy to analyse from far but the real implications and struggles can be only be understood by the people who have dealt with. Only they can understand the pain of leaving their place, their traditions, their customs, their conventions etc who are being uprooted and when they move to other place things may not be that easy for them to accept, to reject as they were in their homeland. Uprooting has this negative and violent connotation that one is taken away from roots and taken elsewhere.

Many a times people comeback to visit their homeland or show their children what their roots are, how they use to live in their homeland or say their ancestors lived, what kind of traditions, customs, conventions they followed. Why do people want to look up to their roots? Answer to this question is people had been hearing stories and tales about others the elders in their communities away from their home those stories imaginatively took them to a different plane of reality different plane of existence. And instead of accepting the situation in front of them they start thinking of that past which they never saw and perhaps they start comparing that imagined past to actual present and this creates in them a sense of ***'nostalgia'***. They start looking fondly about the past they have heard about. Nostalgia is great feeling that takes away from present day reality and it creates a kind of wonderland. Nostalgia is never painful it is always remembering something fondly. There is a phenomenon of nostalgia that is being generated by remaining away from home in different surroundings and is deeply linked with diaspora.

Though diaspora is a term that can be constantly redefined from different perspectives and has lot more connotations. Its definition is not limited in few terms that are mentioned above. But in a nutshell one can explain the term diaspora in connection with these terms. So, diaspora is shifting, scattering all over globe, migration, nostalgia and lot more.

The main aspect of diaspora is shifting where community or part of community shifts. First very important happening of diaspora occurred in case of shifting of Jewish population. They were under persecution, religious hatred and intolerance was rampant at that time and they were not welcomed at the place they lived and they were outnumbered by other people. It may

have been also kind of exploitation because Jews were rich, they were money lenders and more intelligent. They worked their imagination better and so were more manipulative. They were modern perhaps or in order to assert themselves because they were minority at that time they would go back to their old myths and would try to show their supremacy and their distinction. For all these things they were compelled to leave their place and move to another and all of a sudden, they had nothing no country to call their own. So, this is the first instance of diaspora on a large scale where a community was forced to leave their homeland and shift to another place.

When a large chunk of population shifts from one place to another then certain problems occurs. For instance, a new kind of life pattern come into being at the new place. People have left behind their customs, their friends, relatives, enemy and the place which they settle down that place will have its own inhabitants with their own culture and therefore a clash and a process of accommodation would occur at the new place and that will change the pattern both in the case of those who go there and also in the case of those who are joined there by the people who left their original home. When person leaves his or her own place and go away thousand of miles away from their place a new language is encountered. Then language experimentation also takes place as one learns new language forms and new kind of mixture of their language and this new language so new words are coined for different situations or things. Another problem is different types of inequality occurs in the wake of diaspora somebody is rich or poor someone is more educated or skilful, some are superior or inferior this means that people who come from different place are generally in a position of subservience, these people will be suppressed, they will be looked down upon, they will be criticised, they will be treated with pity, sympathy, mercy etc. the people will be less privileged than the people who are already original inhabitants of the place. Another domain of diaspora is existence and experience. The writer, poet or artist among these people who have shifted this place because one always is also a product and producer of culture there is sense of split that occurs within the mind of person who has shifted. So split is about where that person belongs to whether they belong to their homeland or host land, to which culture they belong to or which language is their own. All these things have large number of implications in the mind of a person creating a sense of split, explaining oneself who he/she is. So, these planes of spiritual existence, imaginative existence, their experiences over a long period of time they start engaging the mind of person who is part of community who shifted long time ago.

According to William Safran the term Diaspora can be applied to an expatriate minority community where members share some common characteristics such as:

1) They or their ancestor have been dispersed from a special original ‘centre’ or two or more ‘peripheral’ of foreign regions.

2) They retain a collective memory, a vision, or myth about their original homeland- its physical location, history and achievements

3) They believe they are not and perhaps cannot be fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partially alienated and insulted from it

4) They regard their ancestral homeland as true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return when conditions are appropriate.

5) They believe they should collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their homeland and its safety and prosperity.

6)They continue to relate personally and vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship.

(Safran William cited in Satyendra Nandan: 'Diasporic Consciousness' Interrogative Post-Colonial: Column Theory, Text and Context, Editors: Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee; Indian Institute of Advanced Studies 1996).

Robin Cohen classified Diaspora as:

(1) Victim Diasporas

(2) Labour Diaspora

(3) Imperial Diaspora

(4) Trade Diaspora

(5) Homeland Diaspora

(6) Cultural Diaspora

There is common element in all these categories of diaspora which is that all these are the people who left their homeland and recognize that their homeland lies within them. Homeland is deeply reflected in the language they speak, the kind of culture they produce and the religion that they adopt. Each category of diaspora has a reason or cause of migration which is attached to a particular group of people who migrated. For example, Jews who were forced to leave their homeland or Africans because of their experience of slavery became victims of aggressive transmigration policies, comes under the category of victim diaspora. With technological advancement and development diaspora has lost its original connotation of victim diaspora. Nowadays Diaspora has emerged as a broader concept which simultaneously developed in much healthier form than before. In earlier times the movement has been forced

one now its more of a voluntary one. Now people migrate voluntarily for different reasons such as education, trade, job etc.

Migration can be forced or voluntary which may be legal or illegal. People may migrate to move out of the circle of poverty or may be in search of better lifestyle or to avoid political persecution or may be because of family or social pressures. *Gender* plays significant role vis a vis this issue how the decision to migrate is made, and consequently how migrants are affected. Migration as an experience can go either way for women. At times it could lead to more financial freedom or autonomy for them. At times in the case of illegal migration, women can become very vulnerable, and is exposed to exploitation by their own families, and men of the receiving community.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Vijay Mishra's 'Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary' (Routledge 2007) explores the diasporic works of Hanif Kureishi, Bharti Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, M.G. Vassanji, and Shani Mootoo. He distinguishes between the old and contemporary Indian diaspora. He compares their reasons for leaving their country with their reasons for wanting to settle in another country. In his work, he also emphasizes the importance of understanding the author's history and background in order to appreciate the book they have written. Mishra examines significant works to demonstrate how diasporic experiences impact the imagination and plots of diasporic authors. In his book he observes the unhappy state of life of diasporas, in his words;

> “All diasporas are unhappy, but every diaspora is unhappy in its own way. Diasporas refer to people who do not feel comfortable with their non-hyphenated identities as indicated on their passport.…They are precariously lodged within an episteme of real or imagined displacements, self-imposed sense of exile; they are haunted by spectres, by ghosts arising from within that encourage irredentist or separatist movements.” (V. Mishra 01)

According to Mishra, diasporic imaginary refers to "any ethnic enclave in a nation-state that defines itself, consciously or unconsciously, as a group that lives in displacement." (Mishra 14). Mishra appears to use the term 'diaspora' sceptically; for him, immigrants, transnationals, or global people are not synonyms for diaspora because, according to Mishra, this term

denotes an unhappy breed whose growing fortune or improving economic conditions cannot compensate for their growing pain due to dislocation.

R.K. Dhawan and D.K. Pabby's work 'Multiculturism-Canada and India' presents essays on native writing, immigrant literature, and cross-cultural studies. Essays reflect the rich culture and diversity of both countries, as well as concerns of multiculturalism, which emphasize how individuals from different cultures, races, and religions live and work together. It contains important articles about the Diaspora in Canada, women as victims of marriage, The Dilemma of Being an Immigrant, Criticizing Patriarchy, and Women's Roles in the Development of India and Canada. In words of *R.K Dhawan;*

> "Every nation has a distinct culture of its own. But when an independent country becomes a colony, the native culture undergoes a radical change. This is true of countries like Kenya, Nigeria and India. When these countries came into contact with western culture, a process of change was initiated, and this process in the course of time, destroyed their traditional cultures." (D.K. Pebby & Dhavan, 03)

***Malti Aggarwal*** in her work ***English Literature- Voices of Indian Diaspora*** (Atlantic Publishers & Distributors (P) Ltd.; 2009) (Agrawal) presents collection of twenty-two research papers on the literary works of famous Indian diasporic writers such as A.K. Ramanujan, Uma Parameswaran, Vikram Seth, Anita Desai, Bharti Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Rohinton Mistry, Kiran Desai and Chitra Banerjee. Their works voices the anguish, problems and troubles of the people who settle in the foreign land and how they are discriminated on the basis of gender, race, colour or creed.

***Gauri Shankar Jha*** in ***'Current Perspectives in Indian English Literature'*** (Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd., 2006) has attempted to present the different genres of Indian writing in English. In an article 'Indian Diaspora Fiction in English' Jha makes a remark;

> "Normally diaspora fiction lingers over alienation, loneliness, homelessness, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, questioning protest assertion and quest of identity: it also addresses issues related to amalgamation or disintegration of cultures, discriminating margins of two different social milieus, internalizing

> nostalgia and suffering a force amnesia-we may call it a salad bowl where identity of each ingredient is under question." (Jha 97)

The book focuses on "how Indian Diaspora fiction in English coming out of writers settled in different countries focus the same pattern of content, which appears to be repetitive, monotonous and insignificant though they expose their genuine experience." (Jha 114)

***Sunita Sinha*** in "***New urges in Post-colonial literature"*** (Atlantic Publishers and distributors (P) Ltd., 2009) presents an anthology of articles ranging from hybridisation and subaltern voices to multiculturism and decolonisation. Book discusses complexities existing in the issues of empowerment and disempowerment, tensions prevailing between modernity and traditions, race, gender, caste and subalternity.

***Srutimala Duara*** in her paper '***Immigrant Experience and Pain of Exile in Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake***' points out;

> "The Namesake continues to develop further the themes of cultural alienation and loss of identity that the immigrant faces in making a new home in foreign country. Jhumpa introduced us to people who left behind family and friends and the familiar heat and bustle of India to build a new life in America- a cold, bleak land of strangers and new customs" (Duara 154)

***Sura P. Rath*** in his essay ***—Home(s) Abroad: Diasporic identities in Third space*** (published in the edited volume Theory and Praxis – Curriculum, culture and English studies, edited by Pruffulla C. Kar, Kailash C. Baral and Sura P. Rath, Published by Pencraft International, Delhi-2003) comments on his multiple identities and how they were engaged in conflictual relationship with each other. He presents his trajectory through multiple homes until he finds himself in a position of being neither here not there, permanently being 'out of place' but he turned his alterity into advantage. In words of Rath;

> "The most common manifestation of one's otherness in an alien culture is a question one encounters from time to time: —Where are you from? Not —Who are you? Its follow up is often —No, I mean where you are really from and —what brought you here from there?" (Rath 05)

Rath provides a metaphor of Trishanku for the modern expatriates and immigrants who inhabiting third space. Trishanku is a character from Ramayana who had to settle at a place midway between the earth and paradise. Sura P. Rath concludes;

> "Perhaps in me as in thousands of other immigrants of diaspora who inhibit the third space, live the third culture and shape the third history, post colonialism has come full circle, and the trauma of post modernism has a final relief." (Rath 23)

***Ramesh Babu. T and Phaniraj Kumar A (2013)***, in their paper "Feminist Perspectives in Bharti Mukherjee's Novels" determined that Bharti Mukherjee addresses the troubles and problems associated with the South Asian Women particularly India. She gives voice to the troubles of immigrant women difficulty or exploitation faced by them. Her characters such as Tara Banerjee in 'The Tiger's Daughter', Dimple in 'Wife', Jyothi in 'Jasmine 'and Devi in 'Leave it to me', 3 sisters-Padma, Parvathi and Tara in 'Desirable Daughters' and Tara in 'The Tree Bride' depicts the problems faced by Indian immigrant women due to cultural conflicts or discrimination faced by them. Bharati Mukherjee's heroines are ambitious and assertive. They have the robust potentiality for adaptability; they live inside the firm floor of truth and accept the sour fact of their stay.

***Amanpreet Kaur*** (2015) in research paper ***"A quest for real identity in Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine"*** said that Bharti Mukherjee explores the character of jasmine as evolving and unpredictable. Jasmine from beginning to end has encountered many selves and ultimately found out her strongest point and thus, emerging herself with greater identities. Her adaptable nature kept her ever converting according to new environment. She perceived herself differently each time with shift in space.

***Suchitra Patne (2014), "A Study of Cultural and Psychological Conflicts in Bharati Mukherjee's Women Protagonists"***, observed that in Bharti Mukherjee's fictional world immigrant or expatriate women characters faces annoying experiences in their journey. Her women protagonist faces alienation, identity crisis, cultural shock and consequently psychological conflicts. Dimple, Tara, Vinita, Angela, Nafeesa in their process of immigration became the sufferers of cultural and psychological conflicts. Some of her strong women characters such as Jasmine, Hannah, Panna, Mrs. Bhave emerged as successful immigrant.

***Vembu.T and Geethanjali. N (2019), "Cross Cultural Conflicts within the Novels of Bharati Mukherjee",*** suggests that how Bharati Mukherjee's protagonist present in cross cultural space, face challenges in a foreign land, transform themselves and adapt accordingly to the situation to save their own self. Her novel projects Indian immigrant women in America as protagonist trying to adapt or fit in western tradition or American women migrating to

India for self-realisation. Bharti Mukherjee portrays both kind of women protagonists American as well as Indian because she is comfortable with both the cultures.

**Research Methodology**

An extensive review of the existing literature on diaspora works has been done in the first chapter. The review reveals that a lot has been written and reviewed on Diaspora population, issues and literature. Many national and international writers have given their contribution in formulation of Diaspora theories in literature. Even the issues of gender have come under the research studies. The first part of the chapter on literature review shows that an abundance of research has already been done on two different fields as following;

- Diaspora writers
- Feminism and female writers

There is a need of sincere research to explore diasporic space for women, gender studies in diasporic literature. Diaspora as a space for women is very important because the issue of diasporic women have been unexplored both by society and media.

**Aims and Objectives**

- Conceptualising diaspora from a gender perspective.
- Analyse crossing over of diasporic identity and gender.
- Various aspects of marginalisation of diasporic women.

**Research Methodology**

In order to achieve above objectives, the following methodology of research would be followed;

1. Works of two eminent female diasporic authors Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee will be subject of the research study.

***JHUMPA LAHIRI***

- Interpreter of Maladies
- The Namesake

***BHARATI MUKHERJEE***

- Wife
- Jasmine

2. Some of the noteworthy research on these writers will be would be studied and cited to reinforce arguments.
3. Library work.

***HYPOTHESIS***

Diasporic writing and literature reflect the growing need to understand this phenomenon in which women play an important role in sites of hybridization through agencies of culture, language, and economy. Women's supposed role as custodians of culture becomes doubly difficult when they are bereft of their community's comfort zone. Raising children in a foreign land can be a Herculean task for an immigrant mother, not just because she has to instil the cultures of two worlds in her children, but also because she herself has to come to terms with the new culture. Even in families that are second or third generation immigrants, there is conflict in dressing sense, ideologies and the dichotomy of retaining the native culture as well as blending in with the new one. So, this research will try to explore identity and gendered role in diasporic literature, study the role of women in diasporic space, challenges faced by the diasporic women and how they overcome.

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